

Your Country Neighbor

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April 2012



Flicker Woodpecker On Backyard Feeder

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Voices from the Valleys of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

Devon Adams
Carol Carpenter
Mary Ann Holland
Merri Johnson
Vicki O'Neal
Shirley Neddenriep
Karen Ott
Josh Whisler
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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Your Country Neighbor

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Editor's note:

Seven years of this publication
are online at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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COVER PHOTO

Stephen Hassler

Maybe I've not been watching closely enough, but flicker woodpeckers have been unseen (by me) around my yard for several years. Lately, however, this one has been sampling the black oil sunflower seeds normally devoured by finches, the tufted titmouse, chickadees, and a cardinal "couple".

My friend, Carol Carpenter, tells me this is a female yellow-shafted flicker, (the male has a more "complete red skull cap"). I call it a woodpecker, but my bird book groups it with "tree-clinging birds", as distinguished from "perching birds" and others.

I read that flickers commonly feed on the ground, searching for ants and beetle larvae, but this one apparently has chosen to feed at another "level". And since she appears to be making quite an effort to vary her cuisine, she is certainly welcome by me.



Left to right; downy woodpecker, house finch, goldfinch, nuthatch.

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A Word From Your Editor/Publisher

Stephen Hassler

Your Country Neighbor is hand-delivered to grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, restaurants, cafes, and businesses that advertise in this publication. Look for it in the following cities and villages in our “four corners” area. In **Kansas**; Hiawatha and Sabetha. In **Missouri**; Rock Port. In **Nebraska**; Auburn, Brownville, Cook, Falls City, Humboldt, Johnson, Nebraska City, Nemaha, Peru, Syracuse, and Tecumseh.

Past issues of *Your Country Neighbor* and more rural photos are on-line at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Please visit this website more often. Soon to be included are weekly articles of *The Face Of Drought*, by Karen Ott, and also, community ‘blogs’, a commentary from your town.

PLEASE SHARE YOUR RECENT PHOTOS

If you have a digital photo you would like to share with our rural readership, attach it to an e-mail containing a brief description and your permission to publish.

E-mail to; countryneighbor@windstream.net

Include a statement granting permission to publish one time, allowing sizing, cropping, and other adjusting as may be necessary for newsprint. It must be your work! Include your name and city or county of residence. Your photo may be selected for publication on this page in the months to come. Please keep it recent (2012), and consistent with the theme of “Rural America”, and note that it will probably be reproduced in black and white. Thank you!

Medicare and Ambulance Expenses

Mary Ann Holland, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator

A Medicare beneficiary’s use of ambulance services is covered under Medicare Part B, however, there are restrictions to coverage. If you’ve had past experience where Medicare did not cover your ambulance transportation, this could be the reason why.

Mary Ann Holland, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator and trained SHIIP Professional, provides Medicare education to Nebraskans. Ms. Holland offers the following advice should you experience Medicare’s denial of ambulance expenses.

Medicare Part B, your medical insurance, covers ambulance services to or from a hospital, critical access hospital, or a skilled nursing facility **only** when other means of transportation could endanger your health. Medicare will **only** cover ambulance services to the **nearest** appropriate medical facility which can provide the care you need. If no local facilities are able to give you the care you need, Medicare will help pay for transportation to the **nearest** facility **outside** your local area.

What will you pay? **If**, Medicare covers your ambulance transportation, Medicare will pay 80% of the Medicare-approved amount **after** you have met your annual Part B deductible. In 2012, the annual deductible amount for Part B is \$140. You, or your Medicare Supplement Insurance plan, are responsible for the remaining 20% of the Medicare-approved amount. The good news is, all ambulance companies must accept the Medicare-approved amount as payment in full.

Should you receive a Medicare Summary Notice from Medicare’s billing service indicating Medicare will not pay for ambulance service, you have the right to appeal the decision. The summary notice must tell you why the claim was denied and give you specific information for filing an appeal. It is possible incorrect or incomplete coding information was supplied by the ambulance company when filing the Medicare claim. Your doctor or provider may have to provide additional information in order for your claim to be resubmitted. If you need assistance in resubmitting your claim, you can contact the Nebraska SHIIP [Senior Health Insurance Information Program of the Department of Insurance] at 1-800-234-7119.

Medicare does pay for some non-emergency ambulance transportation, in limited circumstances. Information used for this news article was obtained from CMS Publication #11021, *Medicare Coverage of Ambulance Services*, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Should you have additional questions about Medicare and ambulance coverage, or other areas of Medicare, Mary Ann Holland can be reached at the Cass County Extension office at 402-267-2205, or by e-mail: mholland1@unl.edu

Poetry by Devon Adams

A FAR COUNTRY

A long way over the hill,
behind the sunset,
runs a river of time
that never goes dry.
The water is filled with
the weightless bulk of
memories that exist
forever in the endless
flow of another dimension.
Some day we will all sit
there on the banks and
watch our former lives
as they float away.

DERAILED

At times our train of thought
seems to go off the track, and
we find ourselves derailed from
the daily grind of ordinary life.
Some of our neural circuits seem
to make connections that we haven't
seen before, and insight shines with
a thousand watts of energy on old
problems or boondoggles. We are
suffused with inspiration and make
progress to change situations that
need changing. The process isn't
anything like a wreck, and we find
ourselves rebuilding track in a new
direction that branches off from our
previously destructive path.

OUT OF ORDER

Just as the changing of clock time
to golfer's time upsets our natural instincts,
so does the wavering of weather patterns.
Spring has a mostly reliable pattern that
usually dumps snow on us in March, and
if we're really lucky, in April. But wearing
shorts on Valentine's Day and mowing the
yard on St. Patrick's Day leaves us confused.
We wonder what other quirks are coming in
the parade of floods and tornadoes and
earthquakes and tsunamis and droughts,
not to mention gnats, that we have endured.
Do we need to dig a bomb-proof hole and hide
there, or will a quake crack it open? How far
from the river will we be dry? Will our houses
be sucked into a black vortex and spit out all
over the next county, or will our fields and lawns
shrivel into a rainless desert that replaces fertile
soil with blowing sand. Oh wait! We already
have blowing sand leftover from the flood last
summer. Not to worry, we will pay for this warm
winter in ways we can't even begin to imagine.

DELUSION

The steel rails
walk side by side,
following the distance,
never meeting.
They appear to converge,
as our eyes see
the fiction of perspective.
But the truth is
behind the illusion.

THIRSTY

The sky is a moving smudge
of wet gray tissues, dripping
endless moisture.
Early warmth and gusty winds
have vacuumed the carpet of
the soil until it is powdery and
made of the finest dust that
soaks the rain into its pores,
like a dry sponge.

OUT OF HIDING

Thousands of holes pepper the soil,
where insects and worms have escaped
their winter prisons, digging up through
warm soil to resume their small lives.

JUST A MINUTE

There are those among us
who are never on time.
They are more scrambled
than they are devious, and
you will find them in a panic
when they realize the big
hand isn't going to wait
until they catch up with it.
Even if lists are made and
checked off in order, the
order gets backwards, or
the list gets lost, or the cat
gets sick, or the pants won't
zip, or the shirt is wrinkled,
or they simply miscalculate
how long a minute lasts.
They are always sorry, but
never change. On the other
hand, they sometimes stop
to listen or to look at things
that other people miss, and
in doing that they find hidden
treasures worth remembering.

IMPATIENCE

The gardner is waiting
for clean green shoots
to rise out of buried seeds.
She wants to touch the flowers
that her dreams have already
gathered into fragrant bouquets.

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Submitted by Jennifer Mumm

“I go to work every morning seeing these ducks on this pool of water...”



Submitted by Marilyn Woerth

“...some of “my 400+ daffodils blooming a bit early...”



Submitted by Carol Carpenter
The 102 River in NorthWest Missouri.

Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

I am in....waiting mode. And what's with this crazy weather? It's mid March for Pete's sake. I have been receiving email and facebook statuses from companies that I have ordered from in the past. They seem to have the need to inform me that we have had a dry winter (okay), and that spring has come early (duh), due to warm temperatures. (You mean record breaking highs!)

In their defense they have included tips in dealing with these conditions. Let's see, dry winter, water early in the spring (good advice). And then there's, "Even though we have been having a mild early spring, average last frost dates are many weeks away." Yeah, that's why I haven't put away my sweatshirts and long pants yet (another, duh). I am not going to let Mother Nature fool me.

I'm really not complaining if they have the need to reach out to me with sound advice. I will let them, and sometimes you do pick up a new idea or helpful guidance. For instance, "You may need to move the mulch to the side when it's time to fertilize your plants when they reach a few inches tall. Then move the mulch back in place to get the moisture conserving benefits and continued weed control." Oh, really. I am trying hard not to make a rude comment at this point.

This week I have been enjoying my 400+ daffodils blooming a bit early, and a trip around the yard produced several small treasures. Oh yes, and the six peony bushes and multiple Ballade Tulips I had planted this past fall are all coming up. I did water as suggested, and then some sweet spring rains finally came.

Last week my husband and I measured a large burr oak growing just off our property. Hubby (math major) took these measurements and something to do with pi, (not the kind you eat) and then he went to a web site. Wow, that old burr oak is old, like three hundred years old. Just think, sometime in the early 1700's he was just an itty bitty acorn. I wonder what he would say about this crazy weather? (Pause, old burr oaks take a long time to answer.) He would probably say it's just weather. And he would be right.

The really neat things about extremes from a gardening point of view (and life), is that each different kind of extreme nurtures a different variety of plant. Which is why some years you see more black-eyed Susans, or Queen Ann's Lace, or poison ivy (which is flourishing in the thinning ozone).

I have learned to cherish each new spring, whether I'm mudding in new plants with several layers of clothing on or wearing shorts and sandals while trying to chisel a hole for my newly arrived day lilies. I know that every year will bring many surprises and challenges and I've learned to roll with the wheelbarrow so to speak.

So here in Woerth Gardens, this spring, I will follow the advice I receive from the experts; use some common sense, and try to outsmart Mother Nature if at all possible. And oh yes, while am I in a waiting mode, grandbaby is due to arrive this week. "Any day now," the doctor says. Any day....now? Waiting in anticipation, where life is good, and new grandbabies are the best!

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

As I write this, I'm marveling at another perfect May day, except it's still March. I noted on my calendar on March 1 that the month had come in like a lamb, and it has continued to behave that way almost every day since. Oh sure, the lamb has kicked up its heels a few times, bringing us some windy days. But nothing like the constant March winds we expect.

Early on, I heeded the horticulture and turf specialists' advice to refrain from uncovering perennial beds or raking the lawn. Instead, I gathered up sticks, dug out some pesky winter annuals, and tidied the borders of my mulched areas. That didn't take long. The weather was still gorgeous, but the calendar warned that we were still two weeks from the official start of spring.

I needed another excuse to be outdoors. So I switched gears and tackled the patio. A light film of mildew was evident on the white rain gutters, so I fixed up a bucket of bleach solution and grabbed a handy-looking swivel head brush with an extension handle that I had bought for only a quarter on a garage sale the previous year. It's not something I would have bought new, but for a quarter? What a find! This job would be the perfect opportunity to try it out.

The handle was just long enough to reach the gutters and the underside of the soffits without using a step ladder. On the other hand, I had to reach almost straight up, allowing the scrub water to run straight down the handle and onto my arm where it continued unimpeded into my uplifted sleeve and beyond. Well, one does expect to get a little sloppy doing this kind of task.

I put a little more muscle into it, hoping to get done sooner, and was rewarded with a spattering of bleach water as the swivel head popped off and came straight at me. To add insult to injury, it bounced on the patio and rolled into the dirt of a bare flower bed. I could have put up with that a time or two, but the swivel head kept popping off approximately every thirty seconds. I tried holding it at just the right angle, applying just the right amount of pressure, but nothing worked. It would not stay together. I guess there was a reason it was on that garage sale.

My hubby would have thrown the whole thing in the trash after the second, or possibly *first*, malfunction. Yet, it looked like such a helpful tool. I didn't want to give up on it completely. I managed to finish cleaning the gutters, and put the brush back in the broom closet. I may attempt to apply some duct tape and give it another try before pronouncing it as completely useless.

In the meantime, I intend to throw caution to the light breeze today and transplant a few perennials before they get too big. I'll just keep my fingers crossed that the mild weather continues its run.

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THE FURNACE GRATING

Shirley Neddenriep

A long time ago I lived in a home with a wood/coal-fueled furnace. The furnace, located in the basement, sent its heat up and out through a grating in the floor of a small central hallway. As a child I stood with my siblings on that grating and warmed our toes on frosty mornings until the smell of pretty hot leather drove us away.

The furnace grating location in a central hallway sent heated air out through seven doorways including the upstairs. In winter most of the doors were closed with living centered around the kitchen and its heat-producing cooking range.

But the furnace grating was a favorite place to be for getting really warm after outdoor excursions. Later the house was sold and its new owners switched the heating system from wood/coal to gas or electric. The new system had ductwork with no use for the grating.

I managed to retrieve the grating at an auction with plans to have it built into a coffee table. One day a son had a sandblasting project going at the farm shop. He agreed to sandblast the furnace grating. Getting sand, under pressure, into all the little apertures of the grating was a challenge with all the openings. He also spray-painted it a nice shade of blue.

For more years than I realized, the sanded, painted grating leaned against the wall behind the piano. "Out of sight - out of mind." Then the piano found a new home.

I sent a note to a friend, on his birthday, asking for help. He had been into woodworking for 20 years, self-taught and accomplished. For an interesting tour, visit his home and his shop west of Johnson.

He agreed to help with my idea of building a unit to house the heavy grating. We didn't have blue prints, only ideas. The grating probably weighed in at 75 pounds, so the table had to be constructed with a 'floor' to support the top which held the blue grate. He surrounded the table top with a frame supported by carved brackets. Its a beauty. "Old things are real things. No 'made in China' on the bottom of this piece," from the son who did the sandblasting. Burnt on the bottom is the craftsman's by-line: "Hand-crafted by Clyde Lavigne." Come see it.



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Dogwood in bloom near Carson House Museum, Brownville, Nebraska, March 31, 2012.



Dogwood in bloom in Neal Park, Peru, Nebraska, March 31, 2012

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott

“Curiouser and Curiouser.”

Our wickedly delicious weather has me thinking I've fallen down a rabbit hole into some alternate reality where winter comes and goes like a Cheshire cat, and Indian summer arrives at the tea-table in early spring.

Seriously...there's something about the recent eighty degree days that has Mother Nature looking as mad as a March hare. I'm not sure what to make of it all.

With her warm-to-hot temperatures, blustery winds, and yet another week of zero precipitation it's no surprise the weekly U.S. drought monitor map shows our area as abnormally dry.....or that the USGS Fire-Danger map places the panhandle in the 'high risk' category; the combination of a wet 2011 spring and dry winter has left large swaths of the North Platte Valley a tinder-box of dried-up weeds and pasture grass

Thursday evening a fire started by a neighbor burning a ditch-bank suddenly flared out of control. Racing along the south side of the Mitchell Irrigation canal it sent a plume of rose-colored smoke high enough to attract carloads of looky-loos from Morrill.....and our three sons who own adjacent farmland and pasture.

The neighbor, along with his sons, back-burned an area east of our oldest boy's home ensuring its safety.....but wisely let the rest burn itself out. If we get some rain the burned area should green up nicely.

The early warm-up has certainly lit a match under area farmers who live by the adage, “Make hay while

Continued on page 11 >>>>>>



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<<<< *Continued from page 10*

the sun shines”, Though not literally ‘making hay’ they are engaged in spraying, fertilizing, and corrugating alfalfa fields, shredding corn stalks, and working at a dozen or so related tasks. They’re all smiles; the weather is warm, prices for livestock and crops are high, and things are looking up.

They’re living the dream and counting their blessings.....thanking God for the strength he provides in good times and bad.

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Karen

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If the ‘fly’ hatches, it will lay its eggs on your cedars. If your cedars still have any of these (enlarged 2x), pick them off and squash ’em. Maybe one will come back as a butterfly.

This March photo may be one of the last Bald Eagle photos I get in the Brownville area for awhile. They have moved on, except for those that nest along the River every year. Watch for young ones soaring this Summer.

Of In-laws, Outlaws, and Hullabaloo

By Vicki O'Neal



I drove almost 2000 miles to get to the Family Reunion in the Barada Hills.

We all gathered at the old family farm—the *Funny Farm*—where our kinfolk have lived for many generations.

Our father was there in the farmyard, reigning over his unruly clan with a certain pride. “Straighten your shoulders, now!” Poppa said to everyone, “You don’t want to look stoop-shouldered like your Great Aunt Bertha.”

“That’s right!” my sister said. She frowned. “And whatever you do...” she added. “*Don’t* step in the chicken poop! It’s everywhere!” She’s the Sophisticate of the family, you see. She might wear overalls, at times—but they’re always neat and clean. “Those dang chickens!” she said.

We had a couple of newcomers to the Funny Farm, this year—future sons-in-law...Men who were uninitiated to the ways of the Clan. They watched and listened with trepidation, uncertain as to what would happen next. They had good reason to be nervous.

The hubbub in the farmyard grew louder. The menfolk had taken out their rifles, and were pointing them haphazardly in all directions, sighting down the barrels. Suddenly, a large bullet was ejected from a rifle chamber and fell to the ground. It was examined closely.

“Lord have mercy!” my father said. “That bullet is so big it could’ve blown up the barrel and killed somebody!”

The chatter grew louder. Words were flying thick and fast, now—

even faster than the purported bullets—full of obscure references that meant nothing to anyone else but us:

“Hey! Remember the rabid skunk that Auntie shot in the barnyard with a 44 mag?”

“Yeah...And how about the big black snake in the bathroom faucet? We had to chop it in half to get it out of Granny’s bathtub...”

“And remember that cougar!? Saw his huge paw-print out by the Humpty Dumpty Road!”

“Hey...!” somebody said loudly. “Speakin’ of the old Humpty Dumpty Road...Let’s all go for a ride there in Poppa’s pick-up!”

A few groans could be heard, but most cheered wildly. We all scrambled into the back of the Ford Ranger—fighting for our favorite positions.

Our father obliged us. Poppa took the wheel and we headed across the hills at a high rate of speed, the truck bucking and bumping madly down the Humpty Dumpty Road.

The In-laws were aghast. “You do this for fun?”

“Oh yeah!” we said. “Oh yeah!” The sawdust from the back of Poppa’s truck swirled around us. It got in our eyes and clogged our nostrils. Thorn branches thwacked dangerously close to our heads. We swung around the bend and headed straight up a sloping embankment, the truck straining for all it was worth.

“What the heck...?” the future in-laws said through gritted teeth. “This truck is gonna tip!”

Up and over the embankment we went. Onward, we thundered, tak-

ing a hair-raising tour of Poppa’s grandest haunts.

We flew past the ‘Temple Mount’ and roared across the back-forty, thundering over hill and dale until at last, the truck swirled to a halt amid a cloud of grit and sawdust. We were back at Granny’s and Poppa’s farmhouse.

We all tumbled out. One of the future In-law’s collapsed on the ground, falling flat on his back.

“Lord—what a ride! Are we even alive?”

Bruised and sore, we stood panting. “What’s next?” the kids said. “What will we do now?”

“We’ll eat Granny’s good home cookin’,” someone said, “Then we’ll build a bonfire and sing songs. We’ll make some s’mores, and drink hot cocoa and apple cider.”

And that’s exactly what we did. We ate Granny’s good home cookin’ ‘til we nearly burst. Then a bonfire was built. Marshmallows toasted. S’mores eaten. The sound of happy voices echoed through the Barada Hills.

All too quickly, the sun sped across the heavens and sank behind the rounded hills. The sky turned a soft pink.

At last, it all faded into the velvety darkness of night. The burning wood crackled. Firelight flickered on the slumbering dogs and cats and chickens. I stood looking at the sleepy kinfolk lounging near the fire.

I’d come almost 2000 miles to be here, today: to cavort and play at the Funny Farm...To remember the joys of Granny’s good home cookin’ and the trauma of Poppa’s Humpty Dumpty Road. And now it was all coming to an end. Such a long distance to come for such a short reunion! Had it been worth it?

It was then that I heard my father’s voice speak to me from the dimness. “Straighten your shoulders, Vic!” he said. “You don’t want to look like your Great Aunt Bertha.” I squared my shoulders and turned to go.

“And don’t step in the chicken poop!” my sister said. “Those dern chickens!”

A sigh escaped me—but it was a contented one.

2000 miles? I would have gone 10,000....!

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
Photo Submitted by Author

Fishing

The Missouri River flow is still low and for the why, I have no idea. The Corp of Engineers started releases at Gavins Point Dam over a week ago and the flows do not seem to be affecting water levels here at all. The boat ramps are exposed and fluctuations in river level are not apparent to the naked eye. But with the unseasonal-like weather we have been having, the river temps are exceeding 60 degrees. That means fishing time! The Big ones have been hitting too. I'm talking Blue Cats for now but if the weather keeps going like this the Flatheads will be soon to follow. What are they using for bait? The Big Blues have been hitting chubs and cut bait. The Little Channels are really getting aggressive on night crawlers. Really the river looks like nothing even happened last summer, with fish acting like business as usual. There seems to be a lot of bait in the water right now, but as they find their way to creeks and streams, fishermen's bait will be more attractive thus more action. As for the levels for this year, the first indication is that it's going to stay low until heavy rains come through, and not from manmade high levels from dam discharge flows. We will have to wait for now, so enjoy the unseasonal weather and get back to catching some sizable fish.

Hunting

2012 Hunting Seasons have been set by the Nebraska Game and Parks and are out in the latest hunting guides. It looks like changes all around. I'll be

pointing some of those changes out in coming issues. Spring Turkey Seasons will be opening soon and permits may be purchased beginning January 9th though the last day of the turkey seasons this year.

2012 SPRING TURKEY SEASON DATES:

Youth Archery March 25 – May 31. Archery March 25 – May 31. Youth Shotgun April 7 – May 31. Shotgun April 14 – May 31.


PERMIT LIMIT: Spring – three per person per calendar year.


Hunting opportunities are here with the Spring Turkey Permits available and the spring seasons all set. And it's time to get fishing now that the water is warming up more each day. All I can tell you is fish are biting and turkeys are gobbling and it time to get out there! The rest is up to you! Remember, I'm not an expert but I have my share of luck. I wonder if the experts are having any luck today? So until next time, "Happy Hunting & Fishing."



Picture this month is of a flock of Turkeys foraging for food.

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Poetry and Photography by Carol Carpenter



Black Ballet

Along the limestone bluffs
near Peru Nebraska,
turkey vultures swarm at sunset.

Dozens of dark shadows cast
from crepe paper wings
whooshing as they
effortlessly dance
on warm waves.

These janitors of death
swirl and tango
as twilight's translucent curtain
draws down tight
beneath their beautiful
black ballet.



April

Breathe fresh,
breathe of green
where meadowlarks
bookend dawn and dusk,
where soft raindrops patter
knocking on the door
of yawning earth.

Whirl to the south,
watch spiderlings
cast silver parachutes
trusting the breeze,
trickling brooks
flow freely
down canyon walls,
feel the cool mist
where gorged rivers roar

Rest in radiance
beside the blue pool,
where the lady watches,
whispering, singing
gently tapping the ground
she wakes sleepy eyed children
who stretch supple limbs
and clean faces
towards the sun.



Old Barn

Gnarled dinosaur
stumbles in the mud
a dusty footprint
fossil of weather
and laughter,
work and sweat
once threatened
now extinct

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